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SERMON

Preach'd at

St. Clement's Evening-Lecture.

The First of July 1708.

UPON THE

Sacrament of the Lord's-Supper :

SETTING FORTH

The Danger of not Receiving at all, as well as of
Unworthy Receiving of that Holy Communion.

I COR. xi. 29.

*He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and
drinketh Damnation to himself, not discerning the
Lord's Body.*

By S. COLBT, A. M. K.

L O N D O N :

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TO THE READER.

THE following Sermon was Preach'd at the Request of the Gentlemen of the Society for Reformation of Manners; which after much Importunity, I submit to the Publick for these two Reasons.

1st. To satisfy the World, that tho' I have undertaken the Practice of Physick, I do not decline the Ministry; but shall as long as I live, by the help of God, exercise the Function thereof for the good of Souls, as far as I can, without taking any particular Cure upon me, or interfering with the Office of any Parish-Minister: And I have reason to believe, that I shall do good in this particular in my way of Practice; for whilst I had a Cure upon me, I always observed, that I wrought upon the Standers by as much as the Sick, when I had occasion to discourse on this Subject: And I shall not be wanting to improve it now as much as I did then, and I hope more, as I shall have more Opportunities, according to the course of the World, of never failing to send for the Physician of the Body; however, the Physian of the Soul is forgotten, and rarely call'd upon till Life is despair'd of; as I have shew'd more at large in my Reasons, for the use and conveniency of a Divine and Physian in the same Person, for the good both of Soul and Body; to which I refer.

To the READER.

2. *A second and chief Reason for Printing this Sermon, is for the usefulness and necessity of such discourses, considering how many there are, who never receive the Holy Sacrament at all, and how few receive it as duly as they ought, and the state of their Souls do require. Sure I am, could Men be once brought to a right discharge of this Duty, nothing would put a greater stop to the Immorality of the Age, nor answer more the true end and design of such Societys; for 'tis impossible for them to frequent so sacred and solemn an Ordinance, with any serious and sober Thought about it; but they must have some sence more then ordinary of their Sins, and of the necessity of Repentance and amendment of Life, as they hope for any Benefit by what our Saviour Christ has done and suffered, to put us all in a way of Salvation; and such Reflections could never pass off without some good effect upon them.*

I bless God for it, my labour has not been in vain in this matter before; for as it is a Subject I have very frequently preach'd upon, and with much Pleasure and Satisfaction, so it has not been without its Fruits in bringing many to the Holy Communion, who had lived long in the neglect of it, and others to a more frequent use of it, who rarely receiv'd it. God Almighty grant, that this Sermon may have the same good effect; that not only they that heard me, but every one that reads it, may be so convinc'd of their Duty and Interest therein, as never more to neglect so great means of Salvation. Amen. Amen.



I. Corinth. Chap. xi. Ver. 29.

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body.

TO perswade Men to a frequent Communion, and to endeavour to remove their *Prejudices* and *Excuses* against it, can never be a work out of season; considering the absolute necessity of receiving that blessed Sacrament, by all who would please God and save their Souls; and considering how many do wholly absent themselves from it, and how seldom others do partake of it.

I can hardly think, that any Man who professes himself a Christian, does wilfully refrain the Lord's Table, either by continually turning his back upon it, or not frequenting it so duely as he ought; but under some Pretence or Excuse, which he thinks reasonable and good: And I am so charitable as to think, that there are only a few (God Almighty lessen the Number) but who being convinc'd of their Error, would return to their Duty, and suffer themselves to be no longer lead away by such fatal Mistakes, in a matter of so great Concern to them, as the receiving the holy Communion.

Now amongst the many Excuses that are made, the Danger of *Unworthy* receiving, as set forth in my Text, is almost in every Persons Mouth, that neglects this Sacred Ordinance: And indeed these Words of St. Paul, have been urged too far, as well from the Pulpit as the Press, so as to frighten a great many well-meaning Christians (very strict and conscientious in the discharge of most other Duties) from the practice of this; who might have receiv'd with much more Safety than neglected it:

Therefore for the Conviction and Satisfaction of all such

who have either really or only pretended the dread of *Damnation* here threatned for not receiving the Holy Sacrament. I shall endeavour to set before you the true meaning and import of the Words, and what may be justly infer'd from them, for our Instruction and Direction, in so weighty a Concern.

And 1st by *Damnation*, is meant *Judgment*, of which there are two kinds, *Temporal* and *Eternal*; the one referring to this Life, the other to the Life to come; *Temporal* are all sorts of Afflictions, whether of Mind, Body or Estate, which we are all exercis'd with more or less, in our Passage through this miserable Sinful World, and which accompany us to our Graves. *Eternal*, the Punishments in the other World, which take place immediately upon the separation of our Souls and Bodys by death and at the day of Judgment will be the Portion of both for ever in Hell.

Now tho' the *Word* here and elsewhere rendred *Damnation*, doth signifie both kinds, and both are threatned; yet the latter is only to be understood where the Denunciation or Infliction of the former does not answer the end design'd by it; *i. e.* where Men will not be wrought upon to do their Duty as they ought, and their Holy Religion does enjoyn and require of them, by some *Temporal* Punishment, they must expect to suffer an *Eternal* for it, where they will not take Warning by Judgment here, there will be a Judgment to come, when they will most dearly pay for all; but when Afflictions and Troubles do lead Men to Repentance and Amendment of Life, such have no reason to fear, or be apprehensive of any future Condemnation; for 'tis God's constant Method to punish us here, to spare us hereafter; that is the certain end of all his Corrections and Chastisements; and if they fail of that end, we have none to blame but our selves for it: So that in short the meaning is this; *He that eateth and drinketh Unworthily* provoketh God by so doing to afflict him with some *Temporal* Evil; and if that will not make him fit and prepare himself to receive the same more *worthily*; it will provoke him to cut him off, and condemn him to everlasting Misery and Torment; and how Just, nay, how Merciful is such dealing of God with us? when he might upon the first
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act of our Irreverence and Prophanation of that *Holy Mystery*, appoint us our Portion with the *Damned*, does yet spare, and lays a *Temporal* Punishment where he might inflict an *Eternal*; nay, who will never *Damn* us for ever, for any thing that a lesser Infliction will correct and amend in us; so that *Temporal* Judgment is meant here in the first place, and *Eternal* only to be understood, when that is in vain, and to no purpose.

Otherwise there would be no room for *Repentance*; for if upon every act of *Unworthy* receiving, we receiv'd our *Damnation*, it would be in vain to repent; but God forbid that it should be so; in such a Case the best of us would be in a miserable Condition: For who can say he has receiv'd it *Worthily*? nay, who can say he has not receiv'd it *Unworthily*? for my part I dare not; and yet I hope for Mercy; and that as *Repentance* will obtain me the Pardon of any other Sin, thro' the Merits of my Saviour, so it will the Forgiveness of this; and if I preach the same Doctrine to you, I do but what I am perswaded I have a Commission for from the great Institution of this blessed Sacrament, Christ Jesus our Lord; *who came not to call the Rigteous but Sinners to Repentance*, and who himself tells us, *The whole have no need of a Physician, but they that are sick*; and particularly calls such to this Divine Banquet for Health and Salvation. *Come unto me all ye that travel and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.* Mat. 11. 28.

I know but of two Sins unpardonable in Holy Scripture, *the Sin against the Holy Ghost*, and *Final Apostocy*; and I know that the Reason why they were so, was, because they were past *Repentance*, and so could not be pardon'd, because they could not be repented of. But I trust in God, that there are none of you that hear me this day, but may have the Grace both to repent of not receiving at all, and of not receiving so well as you might and ought to have done; and that God out of his abundant Mercy, will accept of such your *Repentance*, and and for Christ's sake forgive your past neglect and unpreparedness, if you do but endeavour duly to receive the same, and as *Worthily* as you can for the future. It was for this end the *Holy Sacrament* was instituted, to re-

new us by Repentance and receiving thereof, when by Sin we fell away from our *Baptismal Vow and Covenant* : for this purpose our blessed Saviour enjoins us *often* to partake of his Supper, very well foreseeing how often we should have occasion for it ; which he would not have done, had every act of our *Unworthy* receiving brought *Damnation* upon us in the latter Sense, and doom'd us to everlasting Misery ; That were to have enjoyn'd us to do a thing to no purpose for there is no reversing the Sentence of *Damnation*, when that is once past, all that we can do will signify nothing to avert it : Nay, it were to have enjoyn'd us the doing of a thing, which would but insure our *Damnation* the more ; which far be it from us to think of our *Merciful Redeemer* who laid down his Life to save us.

But I would not be mistaken, as tho' I shou'd give you any Encouragement hereby, to be careless in your preparation for the Sacrament ; or in the least to think, that there was no great necessity of *Worthy*, or any great danger of *Unworthy* receiving ; by telling you, that there is Repentance for both, and Pardon ; and therefore I must acquaint you withal, that without Repentance God will never forgive us, and without it we shall not only receive no Benefit by that holy Sacrament, but add to the number of our Sins : And if we do not repent to day, how do we know that we shall ever have another Opportunity : We cannot promise our selves to live a Day, an Hour to an end, much less from one Communion to another ; and if it should happen that we dyed before we repented, or receiv'd that holy Sacrament, what would become of us then ? we were undone for ever, for ever *Damn'd* : Besides, supposing we shou'd live, and yet cou'd not repent, we were in the same miserable Condition ; and let me tell you, we can't repent when we please ; for besides the uncertainty of having time and opportunity for it ; Repentance is the gift of God as well as Pardon ; *for he and he only is the Giver of all Grace*, and Repentance is the Gift of Sanctifying Grace, as Pardon is of Justifying. *if peradventure God will give them Repentance*, says the Apostle, *2 Tim. 2. ver. 25.* so that if it be certain whether God will give Repentance, if it pass all peradventure, that

that no Man can give it himself when he pleases : *To day if you will hear his Voice harden not your hearts*, says the Psalmist; and therefore the best and surest way, is for every one to embrace the present opportunity, and prepare himself as well as he can to approach that holy Table ; and then he need not fear but to have the Grace of God to lead him to Repentance, and the Merits of his Saviour, to supply the defects of his Performance. The Sum of all is this, our Saviour has commanded us to receive the Sacrament of his Supper ; and St. Paul tells us, how we are to fit and prepare our selves for it, as we would receive the Benefits of it ; and to make us more careful about it, he sets before us the danger of *Unworthy* receiving, and gives us an instance thereof in the *Corinthians* ; by which it is plain, that the contempt of this Duty, and not performing it as we ought, does provoke God to send his Judgments upon us ; and that those Judgments are design'd to lead us to Repentance and Amendment of Life ; and that if they have not that effect upon us, *Damnation* will certainly follow.

To clear this Text still more : We must consider what those Sins were, which rendred the *Corinthians* so *Unworthy* of that holy Communion ; and what those Punishments were which they suffered for it ; and then how far their Case may concern us, for the Sins and Punishments of Men are recorded in Scripture for our Warning : And indeed the Sins of the *Corinthians* in this particular, were exceeding great.

1st. They were guilty of *Schism*, divided themselves into Parties, and received the Sacrament separate from one another ; a thing contrary to the very Nature of the Sacrament, which is call'd the *Communion*, from that Love and Unity there ought to be among all that partake of it : and contrary to the intent of our blessed Lord, that it should be free and common to all ; for whatever difference there be among Men at other times as to their outward Circumstances and Conditions ; and whatever distance was to be kept in other places betwixt High and Low, Rich and Poor ; all was to be laid aside at that Table, where there is no respect of Persons ; which they might have seen very plainly, in that our Saviour provided but one Table, and the same Bread and Wine for
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all : But contrary to this, the Rich excluded the Poor as below them to eat at the same Table ; not considering that the poorest Beggar was not so much beneath them, as they were beneath Christ ; and yet that he should think no scorn to sit and feast with them ; What Reason had they then so much to despise and undervalue them ? but in such certainly, was that of the Blessed Virgin truly verified, *He hath filled the Hungry with good things, and the Rich he hath sent empty away*, Luke 1. 53.

2. They were guilty of that Intemperance and Excess, that when they came to the Lord's Table, they were incapable of receiving with any reverence, incapable of distinguishing between it and their *common Meal* ; and some of them that were so full when they took the Lord's Supper, that they threw it up again : Which proceeded from the Abuse of a very good Custom then in practice, to have Entertainments call'd *Agapæ*, or *Love Feasts*, provided at every ones Charge, according to their Abilities, and common to all ; at which every one moderately refreshed himself, and afterwards receiv'd the Sacrament, and what could be a more suitable Preparative than such an Entertainment ; for that which was both the greatest Token of our Saviour's Love to us, and design'd by him to be the greatest indication of our Love to him, and to one another ; But the *Corinthians* tho' they retain'd the Name, they perverted the very end and design of it, by their Divisions, and intemperate use of it.

Now could any thing be a greater Prophanation of that Holy Mystery ? cou'd any thing render Men more *Unworthy* than such Disorders ? cou'd any thing deserve *Damnation*, more, take it in the strictest Sense ; and yet ? you will find that God only afflicted them with *Temporal* Punishments for all their Profanation and Abuse of it : *For this cause*, says the Apostle in the following Verse, *Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep* ; and he forewarns them to *Judge themselves* ; i. e. to acknowledge the just Judgment of God upon them for their Unworthiness, to repent and amend of it as they expected to escape a heavier Judgment hereafter, and not to be *Condemned* in the World to come.

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Now then let us in the next place see how their Case does concern us, for it will signify nothing to pretend such a President for our Excuse, if our Case be not the very same; for where we meet with the like Texts in Scripture, we are to examine to whom they were spoken and denounc'd against, and what their Sins and Provocations were? And then if we find were guilty of the same Sins, we may justly expect the same Punishment.

But 1st. There are none now a days, that can be guilty of such Disorders among us: For we have no such things as those *Love-Feasts*; they have been laid aside many ages ago; we receive in the Morning and that for the most part fasting, which was enjoy'd the Christians upon the Disorder of those Entertainments, and upon their laying aside; we have but one Table in every Church; at which all receive without any distinction, and they are particularly forbidden to come, who are not in *love and charity with all the World*; so that however we may profane those Holy Mysteries now, we can neither do it in that manner, nor to that Degree the *Corinthians* did; and therefore are secure from the Penalty upon that Score.

But you will say, tho' we may not be guilty of those Sins the *Corinthians* were chargeable withal, yet may we not be guilty of other Sins, that may render us *Unworthy*, and to receive with them upon our Souls, may make us as liable to *Damnation* as ever they were; and therefore it is safer not to receive at all, and so avoid the danger.

To which I answer; Yes certainly; We not only may, but God knows, are guilty of many Sins, which render us very *Unworthy* of the Lord's Table: What then? If we do not repent of those Sins, will not the Danger be the same? no doubt of it; *Damnation* is as much due to every Sin that we commit, as to the Sin of *Unworthy* receiving; and if we do not repent of it will as surely follow. And can we think it no Sin not to receive at all? It is so far otherwise, that the worst of us can't be so *Unworthy* and consequently in so great danger in receiving, as we are and will be in not receiving at all.

For 1st. In not receiving at all, we are guilty of the Breach of an exprese Command; *this do in Remembrance of me*, 1 Cor. 11. 24.

And does God command? and are we at liberty to obey his Commands or not? no certainly; not to do the Will of God at all, is as great a Sin, as not to do it as we ought; nay, a greater; for by the one we acknowledge the Power of God over us, which by the other we do not. How can we think that there should be so severe a Punishment threatned for not doing a Duty right; and there shou'd be no Punishment due for not doing it at all? be not deceiv'd, but consider the Thing well, and you will find it thus; we may be *Damn'd* if we receive *Unworthily*, and do not repent of it; but we must be *damn'd* if we receive not at all: Would the *Corinthians* think you have ventur'd upon it else, no, nor any Man besides? He were a Mad-man that would venture his Life where there was no necessity for it; much more that would hazard his Salvation in doing a thing that he might be sav'd without, but must be *Damn'd* for ever if he miscarried in it. God forbid, that I should perswade you to any thing of that nature; no; the thing I am pressing upon you, I know to be of as absolute necessity to be done, by all that bear the Name of Christ, and are of years to understand it, as it is to eat and drink, to keep us alive; the one as requisite *for the strengthening and refreshing our Souls*, as the other *for our Bodys*, that both must suffer for want of them: And as the intemperate use of the good Creatures design'd for the support of Nature, must destroy it; such will the Lord's Supper prove to our Souls, if not rightly receiv'd. It is the same with this, as with all other Religious Duties: Now I am perswaded that none of you ever thought of not praying at all, for fear of not praying as you ought to do; or would look upon it as the wiser and safer course in any that should do so? And yet the case is the same, both necessary to be perform'd, and both dangerous to be neglected; both commanded by God, and both threatned with the severest Punishment if not rightly discharged.

There is not one of you tho' you live never so long without the Sacrament, can die without it: Now is it not very
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strange that you should think your selves *Unworthy* all your Life long, and yet have no fear of *Unworthy* receiving at the point of Death? that you shou'd venture upon it at a time, when you are sue if you are not *Worthy* you never shall have another opportunity to repent and amend of it; yet neglect it, when you may from time to time fit and prepare your selves as you ought, and so great a Work does require? I do not doubt but many that hear me this day, have beheld with what Anguish and Trouble of Mind and Soul their departed Friends have express'd themselves for the neglect of this Duty, as well as for receiving it *Unworthily*; and yet will we not take Warning? will nothing satisfy us but making the Experiment in our own Persons? Whatever Benefit it may be to any one on a Death-bed, who has neglected it all the time before, I can't tell; but to me as little seems to be expected from it, as for a Man's crying, *Lord have mercy upon me*, at the last gasp; who never offer'd up one Petition before, to the Throne of Grace: It is indeed a Conviction in both, of the neglect of their Duty, and a Warning sufficient to us all, not to defer what must be done and *Worthily* too, or we undone or miserable for ever: you will not think me severe in this Sentence, if you are willing to prevent it, whilst you have time and opportunity for it; and if you do not, sure I am you will justify me, by condemning your selves in the Hour of Death, and at the day of Judgment.

2. To shew that the danger is greater in not receiving at all than receiving *Unworthily*: Consider that we can't be sav'd without the one, but by the other we may: By often receiving, in all probability we may come to be *Worthy* at last, because we make use of one of the best means in the World to make us so; for he must be very *unworthy* indeed, that can frequent so sacred and solemn an Ordinance, without some sober and serious Reflections about it; and who knows how far they may work upon him by degrees, and whether they may not by the grace of God bring him in time to a right sense and use of it? but never to partake thereof is to put our selves out of all hopes or possibility of any Benefit thereby; and so expose our selves to the just Judgment of God, both here and here-

hereafter. And don't think it is not so, because you are not afflicted as the *Corinthians* were; because you go from one Communion to another unpunish'd; so much the worse; and you have no reason to presume upon it, but rather to be troubled for it, to fear that God spares you here to punish you hereafter; it is certainly the safest way of arguing, and that which we can never be mistaken into any disadvantage or prejudice to our Souls; but we may be deceiv'd so long by other inferences, till we are past all hopes of recovery. If you do not discharge your Duty herein as you ought, would it not be kindness in God to lay some Affliction upon you, to bring you to a sense of it, rather than suffer you to live and die in the neglect of it, and be for ever damn'd hereafter, for that which might have been prevented by a gentler Correction? Was it not better for the *Corinthians*, think you, that God laid those Judgments upon them, to bring them to a sense of their faults? than to have suffered them to go on in the abuse and profanation of that holy Mystery, without any check or token of his Displeasure? who doubts it? and what was the effect it had upon them? it did not make them give over the use of the Ordinace (which it certainly would, had they not known, they could not do it with any safety) but immediately to reform the abuse of it.

So that all that we can learn from the Case before us, is, that we take Warning how we approach the Lord's Table with unpreparedness of Heart and Mind: least we provoke God to plague us with the like *Judgments*; and without we amend by them, least he *Condemn* us to everlasting Punishment; and if God so severely punish'd the *Corinthians* for their contempt and abuse of that sacred Ordinace, we must never expect to go unpunish'd for the total neglect of it, which is the greatest Affront and Contempt we can offer to it, and the great Institutor of it, our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And now, my Brethren, if there be any of you that hear me this day, who have absented your selves from the Lord's Table, for fear of *Unworthy* receiving, and to avoid the danger thereof, I hope, considering what you have heard,
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and I think may be satisfied in, that the danger is as great, nay greater, never to receive at all, then to receive *Unworthily*; that you will continue no longer in that Mistake, but suffer both to have their proper influence upon you; the danger of *Unworthy* receiving, to make you very careful to fit and prepare your selves for it; and the danger of not receiving at all, to beget in you a just dread and fear of neglecting it at any time, lest you may never have another Opportunity, or God may withdraw his Grace from you, without which you can receive with no Benefit or Comfort to your Soul: I do believe the dread of *Unworthy* receiving has been a real Scruple in some, and the only impediment in their way to the Sacrament; but I hope when they lay the one against the other, it will be no more so.

There is no dallying a case like this, where our Salvation lies at stake; and where the matter is, whether we shall be Sav'd or Damn'd: Did we but well weigh this, no Excuse would satisfy us in the neglect of so necessary a Duty for our Safety and Happiness, both here and for ever; we should lament every Impediment in our discharge thereof, tho' it was what we could not help sooner than frame idle Pretences to keep from it; idle indeed! for what will such Pretences avail you at the Day of Judgment? you will be ashamed to offer them. How will you be able to say, we are afraid to do our Duty, when you were not afraid to neglect it? think you that God will be put off with such Excuses? or what will you be able to answer the great Judge, when he shall demand of you why you were more afraid of the one, then of the other? why you were less concern'd in the Omission of that which was sure to offend him, then in doing that by which you might have pleased him? you must be dumb and silent, and self-condemn'd at such Questions; for there can be no Reason given for the neglect of a plain Duty, especially of such a Duty as is so much the Interest of every Man to perform, who would please God and save his Soul; and such beyond all Question, is the receiving of the Holy Sacrament.

And therefore I beseech you, as you tender your most Precious and Immortal Souls, as you value your present and
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eternal Welfare and Happiness, as you would escape the Judgment of God both here and hereafter, seriously to consider what has been said; and whatever you do, to resolve to do your Duty herein; which tho' you may not discharge so well as you ought at first, yet you may have the Grace of God to repent and amend, and in time become so *Worthy*, as thro' the Merits of Christ, duly to partake thereof, and of all its Benefits to your present Comfort and Satisfaction, as well as to the future Eternal well-being and Happiness both of your Souls and Bodies; which they must never expect to enjoy who neglect it.

*Now to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three Persons
and one God, be ascribed as is most due, all Ho-
nour, Glory, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, both
now and ever. Amen.*

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